Ten Minute Supervisor #7

Fact Sheet: Equal Opportunity

As you well know, equal opportunity is the law! It is also the foundation of building an effective staff team to deliver conservation district services. If employees feel that an atmosphere of fairness does not prevail in a district office, morale will suffer leaving work undone.

Equal opportunity does not stop with employees. It extends to everyone the district serves: board supervisors, agency and government partners and stakeholders, and the customers who receive a district's technical, financial, or educational assistance.

Equal opportunity starts with policies against discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. It also addresses whistleblower complaints under Chapter 42.41 RCW and reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act. However, it transcends these specific issues to fully and completely embrace the idea of fairness in all district programs and activities.

A written grievance policy is at the heart of the implementation of equal opportunity. The policy should describe a single process to ad-

dress any complaint. It must include step-bystep directions about who to talk to and where to go next if unsatisfied, and include several options to start the process. The policy must also obligate board supervisors and managers to take any grievance seriously and find resolution to it in a timely manner.

Equal opportunity provides legal protection to specific groups of individuals. At conservation

districts, thirteen classes of individuals are protected (see *Checklist*). If

When in doubt, get legal advice!

members of a protected class are treated unequally or unfairly, legal action is likely and significant monetary damage awards are possible.

Districts need to protect themselves from the legal liability stemming from discrimination, harassment, or retaliation involving protected classes. To do this, the best decision-makers recognize the protected classes, but they never ever ask about or consider those characteristics in their decision-making. Instead, they keep their focus on the work at hand.

Checklist: Protected Classes at CD's A

1.	Age (>39 years old)
2.	Color
3.	Disability ^B
4.	Gender
5.	Marital Status
6.	National Origin
7.	Political Affiliation
8.	Pregnancy ^B
9.	Race
10.	Religion ^B
11.	Veterans—disabled and Vietnam-era
12.	Whistleblowers (local government employees reporting
	improper government action or unsafe working conditions)
13.	Workers Compensation claimants

^A Sexual orientation is a protected class for state employees and some local governments. If a district adopts a policy protecting employees and customers from discrimination based on sexual orientation, add it to this list.

^B Protected classes requiring reasonable accommodation.